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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
June 21, 2015
4th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 18:20-33; Acts 8:26-38

Hymns: 17; 421; 430; 430:8 (242)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:1-6

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. 2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn,

For they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek,

For they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

For they shall be filled.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount.

What exactly does it mean to be bless`ed? Some suggest that the word simply means "happy." Then our text would read, "Happy are the poor in spirit," and "Happy are those who mourn." That doesn't capture the full sense of what Jesus was saying, but in fact

it isn't completely wrong. There is a joy of heart that belongs to the children of God that prevails over the trials and tribulations and temptations of this life. However "happy" doesn't really fit the Lord's intent. Blessed is more than simply being happy. It includes the privileged state of being that child of God who comprehends the security that comes to us from being in a state of grace, in a close relationship with God. Jesus opened this well-known sermon with the beatitudes so that people might realize that the blessings that come to us from Christ are far greater than the material existence that we chase after in our daily lives, and that remains the focus of life for so many. Life as a child of God is different, and that difference begins in the heart, but it is very much evident in life and the blessings bestowed upon us now as well as hereafter in heaven. The Lord Jesus was opening a window of understanding for those who would hear Him that the blessings of faith include –

THEME: Living in a Blessed Spiritual State.

This Sunday we shall meditate on the opening beatitudes, and next Sunday we shall consider the remaining portion. We start with Jesus' assertion that Christians are --

I. Blessed with a Poor Spirit.

We need to understand that disciples of Jesus, or believers in Christ, are the target audience of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus, –

Matthew 5:1 seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.

There was a great crowd gathered around Jesus that day, so to accommodate the audience Jesus ascended a mountain and sat down to teach. The Spirit emphasizes that *his disciples* came to Him. There is little doubt that many others continued to be present, but the Spirit wants us to understand that this entire sermon was directed toward believers, and should be understood as a lesson **in faith**, not works. People who believe in Jesus know Jesus as their Savior, and not only their Lord or Master. They understand that salvation comes to them through Jesus' merits and not their own. Jesus is teaching believers, and so also us that we are blessed

through this saving faith which has taken hold of our hearts, and so also our lives.

Seeing this gathering of believers around Him,

Matthew 5:2-4 “He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: 3 ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.’”

Jesus’ beatitudes are not a prescription to achieve salvation by our efforts, but rather a list of effects that the salvation which has come to us from God has on our hearts and lives. We are blessed by the Holy Spirit with a poor spirit. This doesn’t imply that the gospel leaves us spiritually bankrupt (quite the opposite is true), or that we are downtrodden by God in this life so we will get to heaven some day after we have muddled through the tribulations of this life.

What the Lord is saying is that by the Spirit’s power we have been brought to understand that we are not, by nature, spiritually self-sufficient. We shall not, by great and careful spiritual introspection, find the divine within our hearts. What we find is that we are sinners who have estranged ourselves from God with our sin and wickedness. There is nothing within my heart that can change that situation. **“I know that in me that is in my flesh nothing good dwells”** (Romans 7:18). However, that isn’t the end of being poor in spirit. It includes an understanding that the Lord Himself brings us life and hope. He lifts up our spirits. He assures us of the blessing of possessing the Kingdom of heaven. So we know blessedness of faith.

But then the Lord continues with a parallel statement that doesn’t sound happy at all. **“Blessed are those who mourn.”** In this life we will experience grief and sadness from time to time. It is part of the human experience. However the general grief that assaults people in this life doesn’t earn them a blessing from the Lord. While we know Christ as a source of comfort for the grief we experience in this life when disaster strikes, Jesus’ lesson here is about a different kind of grief than we experience when we are severely afflicted in some way. Jesus is talking about the mourning over sin that the child of God experiences during life on earth.

And we do mourn over our sin day after day. We know the frustration that the Apostle Paul experienced. He confessed:

Romans 7:18,19,24 “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. . . . 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

That is what we find in our lives also. The child of God isn't casual about sin. The child of God is determined to stop sinning in his life, and yet each and every day we find ourselves slipping back into sin. If we succeed in avoiding one sin, we find ourselves falling into another. When we finally make progress with some troublesome sin we come to realize that all this time there was yet another sin that was tripping us up. We mourn over our sin because we have let down the Lord by our sinful ways. We **mourn** over our sin, we do **not** *celebrate* our sin, or parade it before the world. We grieve that, try as we might, sin continues to be present in our lives. We confess with Paul that we are **wretched sinners**. We grieve, **but then the Lord comforts us with the gospel**. We are comforted by the Lord every time we confess our sins. Every time we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. He assures us of His peace. Today the Lord invites us to receive His body and blood in the sacrament of the Altar. In this Blessed Sacrament He comforts us with the most intimate assurance that He has secured forgiveness for our sins, and that we live in this blessed state of grace.

In this state of grace we are --

II. Blessed to Possess Righteousness.

Jesus said:

Matthew 5:5-6 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

We all know someone who has a meek personality. We might think of them as being unable or unwilling to stand up for themselves.

Jesus says, “Blessed are the meek.” Again we need to consider this in light of the gospel and not in light of a natural personality trait. The child of God is meek in turning the other cheek. The child of God is meek in not living in a boisterous, demanding, or abusive manner. The child of God is meek before the Lord, realizing that one’s life is not one’s own, but that we are the redeemed of the Lord. We realize that we were bought at a price, the precious blood of Christ (1 Cor. 6:19-20). We belong to Him, and He has delivered us from a cruel slavery to sin, death, and the devil. So, in meekness and reverence we seek to live to the praise and glory and honor of Christ, and not simply to please ourselves, or to advance our own personal ambitions. The Lord declares that the meek shall inherit the earth. The children of God shall inherit the new heavens and the new earth that shall come into being at the Lord’s second coming. At that time the rich and powerful, the tyrants of this world shall all fail, and they shall bow before Jesus for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings (Rev. 17:14). To the meek children of God Jesus will say,

Matthew 25:34-37 “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ 37 “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?’”

Even on that day the meekness of faith will be evident. We will not be focused on how many great things we did for others. We will respond in surprise, for the meek don’t keep a running tally of kindnesses done. But the Lord knows them all, and when done in faith and love, then it is done to the Lord. So the meek shall be invited to enter into His glory.

You see, for the child of God the things that the worldly clamor after are not so important. **What is important for them is righteousness.** For the child of God securing righteousness is not about making one’s best efforts to do enough good things that everyone around us will talk about what good people we are. The world thinks that if enough people conclude that you are righteous,

it only stands to reason that God will have to come to the same conclusion. But the Lord knows our sin. The Lord knows that even our best and kindest deeds are soiled and spoiled by sin. Isaiah leads us to confess that “all my righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6), disgusting, foul, filthy rags.

It is not our good deeds to which we cling for righteousness, but **Jesus’ deeds**. He is the One who fulfilled all righteousness for us. God in His grace credits Jesus’ righteousness to us through faith in Jesus’ name.

So when we hunger and thirst after righteousness, we are hungering for the gospel and thirsting for the Lord’s grace and love. We quench that thirst by drinking of the wells of salvation from the springs of living waters that refresh us as they flow from the pages of the inspired Word. Here in church, and in our home devotions as well that hunger and that thirst for righteousness is sated, and we are made complete, and alive, and strong in Him who is our righteousness.

Whenever we hear these beatitudes of Christ from His Sermon on the Mount let us thank the Lord for the grace that He has poured out upon us. It is a wonder of grace that we should be described in these amazing terms, and be blessedness with peace forevermore.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.